

[Town Government, Taxation etc.]

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"Living Lore" series

Francis Donovan, Thomaston, Conn.

January 10, 1939 TOWN GOVERNMENT, TAXATION, ETC.

The action of the town meeting last night in appropriating money for the purchase of an athletic field has greatly exasperated Mr.

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MacCurrie. Fully convinced that the conduct of our town officials is not all that it should be, nursing a grievance against the powers that be in the matter of the compensation money preempted by the town, which he feels should rightfully have been turned over to him, Mr. MacCurrie needs only such an event as the meeting of last evening to set into full eruption the volcano of indignation which has been seething within him.

"Tell me" he snorts, "tell me how they're goin' to get that money without raisin' the tax rate? Goddom it you're goin' to see that tax rate go up as sure as we're sittin' here. Did you read that piece in the paper? They're goin' to get the money through a short term note, at low interest.

"Don't they figure that money will have to be paid back? Low interest! What the hell's the difference how much the interest is? Won't they have to pay it back? Sure they'll have to pay it back. Then they've got this sewer proposition coming along. They're goin' to put in a new sewer, it'll cost 'em about four hundred thousand dollars. They'll have to raise the tax rate then, won't they? What do they want to go to this expense now for?

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"Tax rate is twenty five mills. When I first come here it was ten and then it went up to twelve. And that's enough for any goddom small town. This town was never run right. They brought old Bradley here, gave him the job of Selectman because Johnney Gross married his sister.

He never give an accountin' of what he done with lots of the money that went through his hands.

"They used to give him so much a year to run the town, and it wasn't earmarked. How the hell did they know what he did with the money?

They took his accountin' of it every year in the town report and asked no questions. He took the mortgage on the town hall and gave it to the bank. Some fella had it -- I forget his

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name -- they was payin' him four per cent interest on it. Now, you can't tell me he wouldn't have renewed that mortgage. The bank charged six per cent. They paid for that town hall a good many times over.

"Now this fella they got in there, he's worse than Bradley. I got the goods on him and he knows it. Goddom it here's the proof!" Mr.

MacCurrie brings forth from his inside pocket divers papers, which he thrusts into my hand. Upon examination, they prove to be Mr. MacCurrie's approved compensation claim, signed by the commissioner in Waterbury, a receipt for the same amount, signed by the selectman in Thomaston, and a town report, issued the year he suffered his accident.

"What do you think of that?" demands Mr. MacCurrie. "Haven't I got the proof there? Look at that town report. Shows my board bill, don't it? See anything listed under reimbursements? No. They didn't put it 3 doon, did they? But here's the receipt that shows it was paid to them. I hounded the selectman until I got it. He didn't want to give it to me. Goddom it, I've got him and he knows I've got him. He don't like me. Don't even speak to as any more.

"I asked the girl in there aboot it once. She says, 'Well, you know, a lot of things are listed under miscellaneous.' Is that any way for a town to do business? 'Miscellaneous' is like charity. It covers a multitude of sins.

"My idea is that some day the state will have to take over the superveseion of all the towns and cities. They'll have to have bookkeepers and auditors, and get them through Civil Service. That's the only way they'll ever be sure of absolute honesty. Goddom the politicians, that's what I say, goddom them all." Mr. MacCurrie's wrath cools sufficiently for him to dip into his snuffbox. Then he says: "All I want to do is live long enough to see that dommed selectman get thrown oot of there. Then I'll die happy, goddom it.

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"What do you suppose they do with all the money? They claim they spend most of it on the roads. Why goddom it they've only got a few miles of roads here. And they get help from the state and the WPA. What's the expense to the town? A little bit for tools and mateerials and the like o' that.

"You're always seein' somethin' in the paper aboot this fella doin' somethin' to save the town money. Here a little while ago they had a piece tellin' how he'd got the state to agree to fix the shoulders of the road oot here on Main St. for three feet past the concrete. The town was goin' to do the rest, as well as repair the 4 gutters. What happened? The town fixed the gutters and that was all there was to it. The state never did a dommed thing. Just some more of his baloney."

After a brief silence Mr. MacCurrie observes morosely: "I voted the straight Democratic ticket for the first time in my life on acoont of that fella."

Apparently finished with this subject for the day, he remarks about the weather, which has turned very cold.

"I've had a bit of a head cold myself," he says. "Do you ever read Doctor Brady's column in the paper? Mon, he has some fine ideas, some fine ideas. He claims it don't make a dommed bit of difference aboot drafts and wet feet and the like of that. He says colds are caused by germs and are spread from one person to the other. That sounds logical don't it?

"Take those Arctic explorers now. They went around with wet feet, and were oot in weather below zero, exposed to all kinds of wind and snow. They didn't get colds until they came back. The Eskimos never knew what colds were until the white man went up there.

I inquire if Dr. Brady is now the man who recommends, "air baths," and daily somersaults.

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"Well, of coorse," says Mr. MacCurrie cautiously, "I'm not sayin' that he isn't a little bit radical in some respects. A mon my age doesn't want to be takin' somersaults. Or air baths either, for that matter.

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"But all the same he's got some good ideas. He's always givin' the American Medical Association hell. You know they're fightin' socialized medicine. They hate to see a poor mon get protection for a few dollars a month. They'd rather have him in debt to the doctors for the rest of his life.

"They all hate to see the poor mon get anything. But the politicians are the worst of all. They're no goddom good whatever."